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THE CHRISTIAN LAW OF AMUSEMENT

J. L. CORNING

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OF NEW YORK

1918

THE

CHRISTIAN LAW

OF

AMUSEMENT.

BY

JAMES LEONARD CORNING,

PASTOR OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
BUFFALO, N. Y.

PUBLISHED BY PHINNEY & COMPANY,

188 Main Street, Buffalo, N. Y.

1859.

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TO

JESSE KETCHUM, ESQ.,

OF BUFFALO;

THE FOUNDER OF WESTMINSTER CHURCH,

THE SENIOR ELDER OF MY SESSION,

A MAN WIDELY KNOWN,

AND LOVED WHEREVER KNOWN,

WHO HAS EXEMPLIFIED THROUGH

A LONG LIFE

THE SINGULAR ART OF CONSECRATING

GENIAL MIRTHFULNESS AND LARGE BENEVOLENCE

TO

THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST,

THIS LITTLE VOLUME IS MOST AFFECTIONATELY

Dedicated

BY HIS SINCERE FRIEND

AND UNWORTHY PASTOR

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE substance of this little volume was delivered lately, by the author, in a series of lectures, to the people of his charge. If the remotest idea of ever publishing them had been entertained, they would, doubtless, have been prepared with more care as regards style. But some misapprehension having arisen as to the positions taken in them, the author has chosen to leave them in their original ruggedness, that he may avoid the imputation of having in any degree evaded or receded from those positions. On some accounts it has been deemed best to put them in the form of chapters, and, with the exception of this change and a few verbal alterations, which do not at all affect the original sense, they are the same as when delivered from the desk.

CHAPTER FIRST.

SPORTIVE RECREATION A DEMAND OF MAN'S NATURE.

IT is the extremity of folly for any body to suppose that the general subject of these chapters can be treated with any minuteness of detail which shall do away with the necessity of the exercise of free judgment obligatory upon the individual conscience. The most that can be done is to lay down fundamental principles growing out of the physical, intellectual and moral nature of man and revealed by the word of God.

I beg that my readers will not think the subject is one easily handled because many people dispose of it with great summariness, crying down one amusement with most dogmatic intolerance as if nothing could be said in its favor, and crying up another most imperatively as if the progress of civilization depended on it and all its opposers were monkish bigots. I wish some of these dogmatists on both extremes would undertake to give the church and the world a comprehensive treatise on this vexed topic. If they

would stand sponsors to our consciences, and give us an *index expurgatorius* which shall leave us nothing to do but to look over the catalogue and select what to adopt and what to reject, we would be greatly indebted to them. To hear how peremptorily some of them talk, one would think that they had some infallible touchstone by which to discriminate between the pure metal and the base alloy. If we were papists, and had reconciled ourselves to part with the birth-right of conscience and private judgment, it would not be difficult to get from his Holiness or some of his infallible underlings such an index, very like a diatetic bill of fare for Lent, drawing a line between animal and vegetable food, which would outstrip almost the nice analysis of Liebig and Pereira. But we Protestants have no such piece of mechanism in our ecclesiastical economy. We are beholden more to the individual conscience and common sense for the settlement of disputed points in orthodoxy and morals, whether with better or worse results, people will have different opinions according as they look upon the human mind as a machine or a rational and responsible agent.

It any body thinks this is a subject unencumbered with difficulties and easily disposed of to the satisfaction of the universal christian mind, let him just look for a moment at the divided state of sentiment among people of unquestionable piety concerning it. Call together a dozen christain peo-

ple at random, and I will venture that they will not have discussed the question "What Amusements are lawful and proper for a Christian?" for five minutes without getting at odds with one another on some of the smaller details and applications of the question. If you think that I overstate the case, then try the experiment.

The work of a religious instructor would be quite easy again if, on any fair principles of reasoning, the proposition could be maintained that *all* amusements are either unlawful or inexpedient for a Christain; if it could be shown that the elevation of one's spiritual life and the increase of his sources of enjoyment which take place in conversion, render one independent of sportive recreation. But religion works no such revolution, either in man's physical or mental constitution. It was not designed so to do, it was designed on the contrary to take the human constitution as God created it, interfere with none of its normal aptitudes and desires, but to set upon them all the seal of a divine consecration.

My object in this chapter will be to show the necessity of recreation from the demands of man's physical and mental constitution.

Before proceeding, however, directly to our main design, it will be proper to state what we mean by recreation.

The two great chapters of human life are rest and labor. Midway between these two is recreation, which is neither rest

nor labor.* It is diversion, pastime, play, mirthful, sportive amusement, something which kindles up the happy smile and the ringing laugh. Suppose, for example, a man has been working all day with his arms, will sleeping eight hours or walking ten miles establish a proper equilibrium? By no means. Rest alone will not compensate for labor, and labor with one set of muscles will not alone compensate for labor with another set of muscles. Suppose, again, that a man has been studying mathematics to-day, will studying history to-morrow restore an equilibrium of mind and body? In other words, will the use of memory sufficiently relieve the wearied perceptive faculties? By no means. Men who do not recognise another principle of compensation in the constitution of man will soon experience the sad fruits of their mistake, as many a student has, using mental labors and austerities, and rigors as paving stones on which to walk into an early grave. There is another law of the human economy, not covering so wide a field as the

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law of rest and of labor, to be sure, but a law no less established by the Creator than they. It is the law of recreation—if you please, the law of play. And if it seems to anybody a mysterious thing that God should allot a certain fraction of human life to play, I reply that it is no stranger than that he should allot a much greater fraction to sleep. And if I were to say which is the most ignoble employment for an immortal being, sleep or play, I should certainly say sleep. But it would be a flagrant error to regard either as unworthy our nature, since God has ordained that both are essential. As for sleep, I suppose none of you need exhorting to that duty; as I have no doubt you fulfill your full quantum of obligation in that regard, and not unlikely most of you have some extra righteousness to spare! There is a certain class of mental philosophers who make *mirth* a distinct faculty of the human mind. We need not adopt this theory, though if we were to judge of the reality of a faculty by outward manifestations alone, we could hardly withold our assent. All that we wish to insist upon is that mirthfulness is a state of mind which is demanded by the very constitution of man. The Creator in making man, designed not only that he should work and sleep, but likewise that he should play. If any one suggests that people do not need to be exhorted to the duty of play, since a great proportion of the dwellers upon earth do nothing *but* play, I reply that there are a vast number of people morbidly con-

scientious, who have an idea more or less distinct, that mirthfulness does in some way or other conflict with true Christian sobriety; and there are a vast number of others who, even if they indulge their mirthful instincts, have little more knowledge of the place which these instincts occupy in the human constitution than the animal has of the laws of respiration and circulation. And even in respect to that large number who make mirth the business instead of the refreshment of life, it will do no good to frown upon it altogether. A very *great* point in the cure of excessive mirthfulness would be gained by showing exactly what place it occupies in the human soul, and the degree to which it is demanded by the laws of physical, intellectual and moral health.

Let me observe then, in the first place, that something analogous to recreation is demanded and actually experienced by every creature that God has made.

The very inanimate things of Nature have their play spells. In that beautiful figure of Holy Writ where all the "trees of the field" are spoken of as "clapping their hands," we have a picture of Nature at play. So in the clouds chasing each other across the sky, in the winds tossing and whirling the Autumn leaves mid air, in the waves leaping to and fro, and dashing their sparkling spray upon the beach,—in all these we have rudimentary though distinct signs of the great law of recreation which pervades inanimate

Nature. If we ascend upward to the Animal Kingdom, we see the law more palpably developed, and that which in the inanimate world was but dimly foreshadowed, in this department of being becomes most strikingly manifest. Not a living creature that God ever made, from the ephemeron that is born at noon-day, and at eventide goes to its grave, to the elephant and the leviathan, but compensates for the wear and tear of life by joyful sport. And the lambs skipping and gambolling in your meadows, and the birds cleaving the sky with songs, are only types of the law of recreation which knows no exception throughout all the Animal Kingdom.

But it will be said in reply to this that these are lower orders of being, and it does not follow that man needs amusement because animals need it. I reply that in no order of earthly beings is the instinct of mirthful activity seen in such high development as in man. It has been said that man is the only creature that laughs, and this healthful and exhilerating exercise indicates the height to which the mirthful instinct rises in his mental constitution. So far from mirthfulness being a contradiction of man's intellectual and moral nature, it is demanded by it. It is just *because* man is the highest order of earthly beings, that he can least of all dispense with recreation. If the mere muscular labor of brutes needs to be compensated by recreation, shall recreation be thought unnecessary for or unworthy

of a being, who, in addition to muscular labor, has to undergo the far more heavy and exhausting toil of *mind?* No indeed. You might limit the life of a horse or an ox to the two chapters of work and sleep, leaving recreation entirely out, with *far* less injury and violence to its constitution than would be inflicted upon man if you should apply such a legislation to his earthly being.

What an immense amount of wear and tear a human being has to experience just because he is a human being and not a mere animal;—just because he is not only a creature of muscle, but a creature of *mind.*

Labor of bone and sinew, these man shares in common with the brute; but this is not the chief attrition by which the wheels, and cogs, and rivets, and axles of life are worn out.

In addition to this, there is the busy chisel of thought, chipping off shavings and fragments from the great block of life; then there is the tireless tooth of care and anxiety, gnawing, oh how surely, at the threads which hold the vital mechanism together. Then there is a sense of responsibility, temporal and spiritual, the great burden, the solemn and overpowering pressure of a rational being. Were not these forces balanced by something by which the mind might unbend itself, relax its tension and romp and sport at will, not very long could the vital machinery hold together, as experience and observation abundantly demonstrate. Is

not the world full of examples where men have sacrified health, and at length, life itself by a vain attempt to work without play? This is the curse which is inflicted upon very many of the laboring classes, that the whole of life with them is work, with no leisure left for play.*

Let me now observe further that recreation is the grand preparatory stage for the active life of a human being. God has so constituted human beings that the great business of childhood in its waking hours is play. Till a child reaches the age of twelve or fourteen years it does, or ought to do very little but amuse itself. The future man cannot develope well either physically or mentally without this long play-spell as a preamble. And let me say that those parents who restrain the recreating propensities of their children by forcing their intellects to precocious development, do so in violation of God's laws, and invariably they meet their just retribution in the sacrifice of their children's health or lives. Show me a child who, when its schoolfellows are out in the play-ground, making the welkin ring with merriment, sits meditating at home like another Newton, or in solemn study like a monk counting his beads, and though his parents may say, "What a remarkably intellectual and religious boy we have," I tell you that unless God's physical laws are out of course, that child will be

*I have no doubt that the slaves of the South are, as a body, in this respect better off than the operatives of Birmingham and Sheffield.

likely to die of scrofula or inhabit an insane asylum. His very sobriety and excessive thoughtfulness clearly indicate that the brain is absorbing all the vital energy to itself, and if this process is not checked insanity or premature death are the sure result.

It is certainly most devoutly to be wished that parents would regard it as a religious duty to spend vastly more thought than they do at present upon the *physical* education of their children. And let me add that the chief way to do this is to obey the divine law which has made play and pastime the grand preliminaries to a long, active and useful life.

I wish now to observe that mirthful recreation, being the grand preparation for the establishment of physical health, is likewise an essential condition to its preservation to a good old age. Without it bodily vigor will inevitably suffer a premature decay, as is shown not only by the constitution of man, but likewise by wide observation.

In illustration of this it is a well known fact that American people, as compared with the inhabitants of many European countries, are short lived. One great reason of this fact lies in the almost total lack of any system of healthful recreation in our social system. While it is true that those nations who have carried public amusements to great excess, have became morally degraded, and suffered civil disintegration and decay, it is likewise true that the people who

adopt the rule of all work and no play will be short lived. Of this fact the American people are now furnishing to the world a remarkable example. The two great chapters of our social life are care and work. On this broad theatre of enterprize, where wealth and honor hold out such flattering promises to the eager aspirant, ambition stretches its sinews and girds up its loins for the most persevering and laborious endeavour. There is not a spot on earth where toil of muscle and mind is carried to a pitch so engrossing and exhausting as here. In Germany, Switzerland and France, pastimes and sports are about as thoroughly incorporated into the social fabric, as they were in that of Ancient Greece and Rome. Our progressive and busy civilization will not shelter such trifles beneath its broad aegis. Whatever social recreations prevail among our adult population are for the most part, crowded into our large cities, and there they are debased to purposes of hypocritical politeness, extravagance, love of display and beastly gluttony. So that our national life has become a great, ponderous mass of propelling machinery, with its immense revolving shafts, and its wheels and axles, all creaking and grinding with perpetual buzz, and not a drop of oil to lubricate piston or pivot. Hence, we present to the world the melancholy picture of a nation blessed with resources of knowledge, invention and enterprize unparalleled in the history of the world, yet wearing out and running into premature senility with fearful rapidity by sheer force of uncompensated care and toil.

Now let me further observe that a strict obedience to the laws of man's physical constitution will not conflict with, but on the contrary, in the highest degree promote, the well being of his intellectual and moral nature. If mirthful recreation is essential to physical health, as it surely is, and that to the very latest period of life, then it cannot in any way conflict with the health of the soul.

God has made all the parts of the human constitution coordinate and harmonious, and the promotion of the vigor of one part can in no way be inconsistent with the welfare of the whole organism.

What do we then infer from all this? We infer that mirthful recreation is not only lawful for, but it is morally obligatory upon, every rational being. It not only does not conflict with religion, but it is one of its *great demands.* It is not only permitted to a christian man to divert himself, but it is his most solemn duty—*solemn* duty I say—for there are some people who are dying for want of recreation, but who never can be got to obey the imperative demands of their nature except they hear the very thunders of Sinai rattling over their heads, and the voice of the Most High commanding them out of their frozen propriety and austere behaviour.

There are many christian men and women worn out by dyspepsia and chronic melancholy, who could actually be trebled in value to the church and the world if they could

be persuaded to devote an hour every day to mirthful sport, just as scrupulously as they devote a given period to reflection and prayer.

But it is said, recreation is liable to abuse. Perhaps nothing is more so, as we shall show by actual examples in our next chapter. Would it not be better then, it is asked, to banish amusements from our social life altogether, than to subject the privilege to such unwarrantable license? By no means, we reply. To abolish a good thing is no way to remedy the abuse of it. Gluttony is an abuse of the eating privilege, and though I never yet heard a sermon preached against it, yet I have no doubt that it is an evil, whose baleful consequences are far more wide spread than drunkenness. But if we should advise you to take up arms against gluttony by entire abstinence from food, I fear your stomachs, if not your common sense, would vote us out of the pulpit.

Avariciousness is an abuse of the desire of gain, which is a normal and God-implanted sentiment of the human mind. And avariciousness is moreover a poison which has run into almost every vein and artery of human life, both in the church and out of it. But he would be the veriest simpleton on earth who should recommend as a cure of this crying sin that people burn down their houses and throw their gold into the sea. The evil consequences ensuing on this course, would be far greater than those which now follow an inordinate love of gain.

nor labor.* It is diversion, pastime, play, mirthful, sportive amusement, something which kindles up the happy smile and the ringing laugh. Suppose, for example, a man has been working all day with his arms, will sleeping eight hours or walking ten miles establish a proper equilibrium? By no means. Rest alone will not compensate for labor, and labor with one set of muscles will not alone compensate for labor with another set of muscles. Suppose, again, that a man has been studying mathematics to-day, will studying history to-morrow restore an equilibrium of mind and body? In other words, will the use of memory sufficiently relieve the wearied perceptive faculties? By no means. Men who do not recognise another principle of compensation in the constitution of man will soon experience the sad fruits of their mistake, as many a student has, using mental labors and austerities, and rigors as paving stones on which to walk into an early grave. There is another law of the human economy, not covering so wide a field as the

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scientious, who have an idea more or less distinct, that mirthfulness does in some way or other conflict with true Christian sobriety; and there are a vast number of others who, even if they indulge their mirthful instincts, have little more knowledge of the place which these instincts occupy in the human constitution than the animal has of the laws of respiration and circulation. And even in respect to that large number who make mirth the business instead of the refreshment of life, it will do no good to frown upon it altogether. A very *great* point in the cure of excessive mirthfulness would be gained by showing exactly what place it occupies in the human soul, and the degree to which it is demanded by the laws of physical, intellectual and moral health.

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passed from human countenance as He entered the abode, never child ceased to frolic because He was near. We speak most seriously, deliberately, and reverently, when we say that if, in the degenerate state of the Jews at the time, they still retained any noble melodies commemorative of the days and deeds of the first Asmodeus, He would have listened while they were sung without commanding silence, and sanctioned by His sacred approval the flow of manly mirth.—Because worldly amusement, as we in general find it, is unworthy of man, let us not forget that the relaxing, and yet, reinvigorating enjoyments of social entertainment were never frowned upon by Him whose sympathy embraced everything beautiful and true in this universe." (Peter Bayne's Essays on Christian Life, pp. 357, 360.)

My youthful readers will fairly infer, from what has been now said, that I am no enemy to amusements. Certainly I should be ashamed to take a position so utterly at war with God's laws and man's well-being as to draw on a professional scowl at the natural effervescence of your bounding spirits in joyous mirth. I never will do such a thing; no, not when youth with me is but a dim memory of the past, and life's hope-thwartings have plowed deep furrows on my brow.—Do not think that religion consists in abstinence from mirth, for let me tell you religion is something quite other and far nobler than that. And, therefore, when at proper seasons and under due restraints, you indulge your mirthful propensi-

ties, do not inwardly shiver and have an ague of conscience, as if you were doing something which displeased God. For it is not so; let them deny it who will. God created *all* the instincts of the human mind to be exercised, *mirth* among the rest; and when you learn the divine art of using every instinct of your nature, without detriment to any other, and all for the honor of Christ, you will have attained a pitch of piety which has rarely even an approximation among men.

CHAPTER SECOND.

RESTRICTIONS OF AMUSEMENT.

FOR *as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool,* is the language of an inspired pen. Therefore never laugh, some one will say. Total abstinence is the sole cure for all the abuses which afflict society, according to some people's philosophy. Now this is not a specimen of God's therapeutics. God is not willing that all the good things of His creation which people have abused should be blotted from existence. People have dreadfully abused the eating privilege, but God would excuse no man on this account for going about with forceps and turnkeys, extracting everybody's teeth. God holds Himself responsible for the existence of teeth and palates, and ten thousand varieties of food. But let no one on this account lay all the gluttony of the world over to His charge.

God created the grape, the rye stalk and the barley grain; but he is not going to set fire to all the vineyards because people get drunk on wine; nor destroy all the rye-fields

because people distill their harvests into whiskey; nor annihilate every barley grain because your very civilized city is full of beer drinkers. He is willing to be held responsible for grapes, and rye, and barley; but let any one charge drunkenness over to God's score at his peril.

Neither will God destroy His good things because Satan and all his colleagues have appropriated many of these things to their own nefarious purposes.

Music has been, for the most part, in the hands of wicked people. It has been used to stimulate men to butcher one another on the battle-field. It has in all ages been employed to make vice and debauchery attractive. Will God on this account repent Him that He has made harmonious sounds, and turn the world into a great Bedlam of harsh discords? Not He. No, not any more than He will take oxigen out of the atmospheric air and leave mankind to suffocate, because a great proportion of them spend their breath in wicked devices. God will not destroy one of the good things that He has made, no, not the very least of them; nor will He justify any of His creatures in so doing because people abuse them. If I wanted to make an incurable glutton of any one of my readers, I would put him on a system of prolonged fasting till the stomach was fairly frantic with hunger, and then I should expect that he would break loose from all hygienic laws and gorge himself like a swine.

Only let me repeat this experiment often enough, and I could make up gluttons to order by the thousand.

And if I wanted to stock the world with people who should do nothing but laugh from morning to night, I would restrain the mirthful instincts of every one till the appetite for sport was at a pitch of desperation; and then I would let Bucephalus go, and if he did not break the neck of his rider it would not be the fault of of his training.

As the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool, says the wise man. A very homely figure this, but true to the very life. In fact, it seems many times to one reading the metaphorical parts of Scripture, as if rhetorical elegance was sacrificed to force of expression. Of *this* you may be sure; God will never bury or half conceal or gloss over a wholesome truth to save a fine figure of speech, or to turn a period handsomely. The thing is often done by preachers; but you cannot find an instance of it all the way from the garden of Eden to the island of Patmos.

The idea of the text is simply this. If you want a pot to boil you put something else under it besides thorny brush wood, which, though it gives a great crackle, yet gives little heat. For purposes of heating, one solid hickory log would be worth a cord of brush wood.

Just like that is the laughter of a fool—that is mirth unguided by reason; it is noisy, but useless. It gives no

healthful glow to the physical and mental system, and is as distinguished for its utter worthlessness as for its noise.

What are some of the rational and christian restrictions of amusements? is the inquiry to which we will attempt an answer.

And first, bear in mind the principle already enunciated in our former chapter, that recreation, like rest, is not for its own sake, but for the sake of something far higher and nobler, which is labor. Man does not work for the sake of play, but he plays for the sake of work. Duty, toil, achievement, sober, manly endeavor for some high and enduring life-results, these are, or ought to be, the ascendant objects of a human being's ambition.

This principle is in perfect harmony with the law of play in childhood. Play is the great business of childhood, because it is subservient to work, and because, till childhood has passed, the two great instrumentalities of work, mind and muscle, have not acquired a vigor and readiness for full activity. Just because work is the great business of life, ought play to be the great chapter of childhood; and anybody who expects that the working man can be worth much without growing out of the laughing, sportive child, will be disappointed.

But passing by childhood and coming to the period of life where the powers of body and mind have acquired a good degree of maturity; and here we see an entirely different

application of the law of subordination of play to work. The working period has now actually come. The bell has struck, calling God's operatives to their various departments of labor. And whereas in childhood play was the rule and work the exception, now work becomes the rule and play the exception. Whereas in childhood, a very large quantity of amusement was absolutely indispensible to the development of the intellectual and physical powers, now in adult life the same quantity will debilitate and debase both mind and body.

Of this we see instances around us every day. We see not only parents trying to make sober men and women of little children, but we see men and women, who ought to be sober, making children of themselves by turning life's work-shop into a play-house. We see them making mirth the business of life, turning what was only designed as oil for the vital machinery, into that machinery itself.

Oh, it is a sad sight to look upon. Dying beds and funerals are not half as sad; and in this sense, as well as many others, that is a true declaration of scripture, *It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.* Let us make our fancy a canvas and draw a picture to illustrate our meaning.

Unless you send a "regret" to that large party on Avenue, no matter what, for next week, you will see several counterparts of what I am going to describe to you. We would

not be invidious toward one sex in distinction from another; but to be definite, we will suppose the subject of our sketch to be the creature commonly called by naturalists "a lady," and by this I mean a woman of fashion; for the terms are nearly synonymous in modern nomenclature.

Her diary for six days in the week would run somewhat on this wise: Up in the morning just time enough to say A. M., say quarter before twelve; breakfast on three dishes, omolette, headache and scolding. Then away to return calls of social friendship;—glad enough, however, if the dear friends are not at home! Stopping at the doctor's by the way to get a tonic for a weak nervous system;—most mysterious providence that one of such regular habits should be afflicted with chronic dyspepsia! Then dodge in at Stewart's and run up a score of some hundreds for a poor drudge of a husband in honiton, point-lace, brocades and all the trimmings. Then to the milliner's, and a long earnest homily to the matron of the needle, as if hooks and eyes were as important in God's universe as sun, moon and stars.

Then home with a yawn and dress for the evening soiree; and what between nine at night and the grey of the next morning I need not tell you.

If I should describe the physiognomy of our subject I should say that her face indicated most clearly the three characteristics of physical disease, intellectual imbecility and hypocrisy. Poor creatures! their entire organism, physical,

mental and moral may be summed up in three words, dyspepsia, frivolity and falsehood.

There are many people of whose history, for six days in the week, and almost fifty two weeks in the year, this is a pretty exact compend.

We see here an illustration of the sad effects of violating the law of our physical, mental and moral natures by making amusement the business of life; by making laughter the daily diet instead of the occasional condiment of human existence. There are thousands of people in civilized communities who, to speak familiarly, live for nothing but to have fun. Every breath almost is spent in giggling, every step that should be a foot-print on the tread-mill of sober work, is a waltz figure. Now such a condition of things can never take place without the most melancholy results to body, mind and soul, as seen in multitudes of examples such as we have given a type of.

We must here remark, however, that the gigantic evils connected with our fashionable, social assemblies, and our corrupting public entertainments do not by any means all grow out of an excessive indulgence of the mirthful propensity. There is an idea prevalent with many that such is the case. But this idea is radically erroneous, and ought to be corrected. A great many christian people point to our large, gay, extravagant parties and say, "Look there, and see how mischievous the desire for amusement becomes when

it gets in the ascendant;" as if all the evils of our fashionable parties were to be laid to the score of mirth. Now we will not deny that *some* of the evils connected with these entertainments grow out of excessive mirthfulness, *but they are the very least of the evils.* If it were left simply to the instinct of mirth, the desire of amusement, even supposing it to be excessively developed, if it were left to this sentiment to prescribe the details of a social entertainment, do you think the result would be one of our evening parties of fashion? Far from it. For instance, do people sit up till the small hours in the morning to be amused? Not so. The child *lives* to be amused; and, true to that instinct, he goes to bed with the chickens and rises singing with the lark. And now, if you should wake up to-night at twelve o'clock and see one of God's gleeful sparrows on the wing and should say that in this act it was obeying its mirthful instincts, you would not be more false to common sense than if you were to say that people sit up, walking drawing-rooms till three o'clock in the morning, simply to *amuse* themselves.

Again, suppose a man incurs an enormous expense to fit out an evening entertainment, burning gas enough to supply a small village and perhaps compelling the confectioner to go to the Sheriff to get his pay. Or, suppose a woman, in order to be fit to be a guest at this same party, invests enough money in laces, flounces and jewelry to support three thrifty families a year, (a thing by no means uncommon) do you

suppose these poor fools indulge in this awful extravagance simply to be amused? If I am not mistaken some other propensity, and one far worse than mirthfulness, must be brought into court to account for these abuses. To point to these things as arguments for the repression of the desire for amusement is extreme folly. To point to them as examples of a wicked servility to fashion, and a wicked love of display, would be far more rational. If you could blot out all the mirthful instincts of the human soul, you would not cure the great abuses connected with what are called fashionable amusements. You would not destroy the corrupting influences of the theatre, you would not make the opera less objectionable, you would not make our large evening entertainments of style less noted for extravagance, gluttony and hypocrisy. These things are no arguments against amusements at all. They are, as we before observed, legitimate arguments against mental intoxication and servility to custom and ambitious love of display.

And, just here as well as anywhere else, I wish to put in a remark upon a very current mode of religious teaching concerning the sins of our large evening social entertainments. It is, to me, a matter of surprise that so much has been said about the least of these evils, and so little about the greatest of them. I cannot help thinking that many christian people have a wrong standard of judgment in reference to this great subject; else we should not see such egregious mistakes in

moral measurement. Let me explain myself. Did you ever hear a sermon preached specifically on the sinful excess of ornament and attire connected with large parties?

Again, did you ever hear a sermon or read a tract on the wickedness of a system of late hours, on the dreadful sin of thus undermining physical health by depriving the body of rest during the period when God designed it to sleep?

Again, did you ever hear a sermon or read a tract upon the monstrous crime of gormandizing and that at the most unseasonable hour of the day, universally prevalent at our fashionable entertainments?

Again, did you ever hear a sermon or read a tract designed to show the tendency of our parties, as they are at present constructed, to create and nurture a politeness as hollow and false as the bosom of Judas Iscariot? If you have heard sermons or read tracts on these crying evils, you have been more thorough in your literary research than I have been.

Now, please to remember, that these things can never be right under any circumstances. Late hours, gluttony, extravagant display, hypocritical etiquette, these are never right and never can be.

But here, linked with them, is an amusement which, restricted within due limits, and indulged at proper seasons, is not only harmless, but every way beneficial both to body and mind, and lo! *this* is the great scarecrow of the ecclesiastical conscience. Now, let it not be thought that in this we offer

the most remotely implied endorsement of dancing as it is practised at present, with all its sinful appendages and in some of its more fashionable figures. But, take it in its most objectionable form, and I am free to say that, among the evils connected with our fashionable parties, it ranks among the least. Why, I have sat beside a professing christian woman in one of the beautiful parlors of a fashionable metropolitan avenue, whose jewelled neck and ears and fingers and dazzling brocade, as much as said to the assembled guests, "none of your dresses cost as much as mine;" and then I have seen her go into the supper-room and eat enough to make a swine have gripes of conscience, and then come out, obese, and panting for breath, made marvelously religious by sandwiches and champaigne, and wind up the farce with a pious discourse on the sin of dancing!

Now, I think that if she had transported a portion of her conscience from her slippers to her stomach, though she might have had an inch or two less of phylactery, the loss would have been compensated by several additional yards of christian consistency.

But some one will say, does not the unanimous consent of the chirstian world decide that dancing is inexpedient? I reply, I have not said yet, that dancing is expedient for a christian. But, eating all manner of trash at late hours and thus sowing the seeds of death, and robbing Christ's poor of their rightful tribute of benificence for the sake of

appearing under that frescoed ceiling with as many diamonds and flounces as the silliest of your neighbors; these things are more than inexpedient, and dancing does not approach them in enormity. And all I say is, that if I were going to write a course of sermons on the evils associated with large parties, I would first dispose of the unlawful things, and then, if I had time, I would have a talk about expediency. And now, to be explicit, if any one should fear that we shall in some way, countenance somebody's "light fantastic toes," which are only waiting ecclesiastical permission to skip in all the figures, from cotillion to redowa, we will say a word or two further on dancing.

Here is a question which will bring the matter to a definite point. Ought christians to dance at our large, gay, fashionable balls and parties, where night is turned into day, and the sun-rise hardly finds the jaded body in bed, where things most positively injurious to physical health are eaten, where doctors' bills are run up and apothecaries' shops get patronage, where the ascendant motive is display of dress and the ascendant etiquette a whited sepulchre; ought christians to dance at such places? A thousand times no, we reply. But further we say, it is not much greater sin to *dance* there than to *be* there, especially if you happen to partake with gusto in *everything else* except the dancing. If you go there and hang out all your flags and get what you go for, viz: admiration for laces and silks; if you go and

get all the gastric miscellanies a professed gourmand might wish to devour, then you can hardly exceed the wickedness by dancing.

And further, I can see a great advantage which would ensue if we could get some conscientious people who frequent fashionable parties, to dancing; for, on the score of gluttony and servility to fashion and display in dress, we cannot convict them of sin; but if, in an unguarded moment, they should happen to get to beating time to the piano with their *feet* instead of their *hands*, I suppose they would then be willing to do any amount of penance!

Now it is very easy to suppose a set of circumstances in which dancing should be every way proper. On the highlands of Scotland and the green swards of Switzerland, in the rural districts of Germany, you see this amusement in its virgin character, dissociated from its civilized appendages.

There, it is a most useful diversion, cultivating the musical taste, exhilarating the mind, quickening all the bodily functions into a glow of healthful activity.

And what is not unimportant too, the moral sense of good people is not offended by the indulgence. To dance under such circumstances is just to do the most harmless thing in the world, next to laughing. I will add too, that after a careful reflection upon this diversion considered in its physiological and healthful relations, there is hardly one that I

would recommend in preference to it, *if the afore mentioned circumstances could be realized.*

And now you will ask, "What are we to do meantime?" I shall not answer this question; your own conscience must decide. I will only add this, that if you would not be willing for the sake of expediency to give up so harmless a thing as dancing, that is to say, if your conscience decides that the indulgence will cause any one to sin, then you are no true follower of Paul, who said, *If meat make my brother to offend I will not eat meat while the world standeth.*

I will quote again from the author cited in our last chapter, Mr. Peter Bayne. He is speaking on the subject of dancing as an amusement. Says he, "When you can trustfully grasp the hand extended to yours, when you know the smile on the lip that addresses you to be the speechless voice of the viewless spirit of kindness; when you can be assured that the tongue now tuned to soft geniality and friendliness will not to-morrow slander your name, when mirth flows in its natural channels, and trustful heart leaps in sympathy with trustful heart, then all is right. And if in such an assemblage the joyous exhileration will be increased by moving to harmonious sound with gestures of beauty and vivacious grace, let no one object to the dance; the buoyant leaping of the blood is nature's, the laws of beauty in sound and sight are nature's, who can say they are wrong? The rain falls

no less cheeringly because the sunbeams painted the clouds with gold and vermilion; industry and action flourish all the better for this sporting in the sunlight of mirth and gladness." (Essays on the Christian Life, p. 360.)

If you were going down the street to-morrow morning and should pass a band of music playing some lively air, your feet would, imperceptibly to yourself, fall into the measure of the notes, and in doing so they would obey a law of beauty and propriety which God has implanted in your very nature. But in doing that act you would be fulfilling all the essential conditions of the dance in its natural state, with the important subtraction, however, of the social element, which, so far from being an objection to it, greatly enhances its value. Now I am sorry that so natural and every way beneficial an exercise should be spoiled by the admixture of corrupting associations; but if you can dissever it from these, I dare not take upon myself the responsibility of saying that you ought not to dance.

Music and dancing are in my view, two, among the redeeming features of American Slavery. I never saw a Southern slave dance, (and I have seen a goodly number of them handle the "light fantastic toe," to the discomfiture of all the ballet masters of a Parisian saloon,) I say I never saw a black slave dance, but the sight did my very heart good. Oh, yes, blessed be God, slavery is not all made up of auction blocks and hand-cuffs and driver's whips. It has plenty of these

infernal appendages; but it has many a joyous spot; and if I could do it to-morrow, by one ecclesiastical fiat, I would not blot out the songs and dances from every Southern plantation to justify all the misanthropic pietism that has existed from the Pharisee, whose self-righteousness fell under Christ's withering curse, down to the last monk that put on a hair cloth shirt, or walked with peas in his shoes. If I could not make a slave, just come from the sweat of the sugar mill, the rice plantation, or the cotton field, dance in any other way, I would urge it as a religious duty. And in fact, dancing is a part of the religious worship of slaves in many parts of the South. I have attended a prayer meeting in a negro cabin, and seen old and young form a circle and dance most nimbly to the words, "I'm bound for the Land of Canaan." I have no doubt that their toes and heels were somewhat auxiliary to their jubilant worship.

I can hardly conceive of any law of expediency which should rule out this diversion among the slaves at the South. To them it seems an indispensable parenthesis in the drudgery of their daily toil, as well as a necessary scape-valve for the outflow of their excessive animal spirits.

But this rule will not apply to you and me, for we are neither negroes nor slaves; we can find many another pastime besides dancing, and harmless as it is in itself considered, yea, immensely beneficial as it undoubtedly would be, both to mind and body, if unperverted and dissociated from its cor-

rupting appendages; yet remember the Pauline rule—*If meat make my brother to offend, I will not eat meat while the world standeth;* and if your conscience decides that any one would be likely to be led into sin by your indulgence in this diversion, then by all that is sacred in Christian obligation, and all that is solemn in moral influence, I beseech you not to dance, no, not in your room alone, if any one might chance to see you through the keyhole, or hear the creaking of the rafters overhead. I have given you the principle and shall not undertake to apply it to individual cases. If you say "I am convinced that my influence will be injured by dancing, and therefore will refrain," I commend your choice. If you say, "I am convinced that in a little social circle, where all is sincerity and lawful mirth, I may dance without injuring myself or anybody else," I do not condemn you. *Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind,* remembering that *to his own master he standeth or falleth.*

CHAPTER THIRD.

RESTRICTIONS OF AMUSEMENT—(CONTINUED.)

AN amusement to be normal in kind or degree should leave the whole man, body, mind and soul, in a better condition than it found them. Amusement should likewise, as we have seen, be the parenthesis not the business of life. It should not, by any means, occupy the bulk of one's time. On the contrary, its subservience to the higher ends of life entitle it only to a comparatively small fraction of the sum total of human existence. If then, with these two principles in view, I should describe a model amusement, it would be one which, in the shortest possible space of time, should improve the whole man; refresh, invigorate and build up the whole organism, physical and mental. Show me the pastime which, while it inflicts no damage upon the moral nature, exhilarates the spirits, quickens the circulation, repairs the nervous system, developes the muscular fibers, draws the blood from the congested brain down through all the glands, and tissues, and vessels of the lower organism of trunk and limbs, in short re-edifies the entire man without detriment to any one part, and does this in the briefest possible period

of time; show me such a pastime, and every law of man's physical, intellectual and moral nature points to it as *par excellence*, the best thing of its species. Among all the diversions imaginable, this one carries off the palm.

And let us here observe that one of the chief things to be said in favor of an amusement which should thus develope and re-invigorate the whole man is, that *it saves time*. It does its work up not by piecemeal, but all at once; just as the sun does not rise one day to give light, and another day to warm vegetation, and another day to paint the flowers, and another day to cause the earth's exhalations; but does these at one and the same time, omiting nothing that belongs to one office in discharging the duties of another. If the sun should do its work by piecemeal it would take it a year to do what now requires only a day. Now if you could find some pastime which shall perform the restorative offices of a pastime *all at once* instead of one at a time, you have found one which, of all others, is excellent in its correspondence with the law of subordination of play to work. It is *such* a pastime that above all others, a christian ought to select, who, if he is true to his name, is jealous of every moment of time which is subtracted from the grand serious work of life, to glorify God in saving men.

Now there are some amusements which operate simply on separate parts of the organism. There are some, for example, which do nothing but quicken the play of the feelings by

appeals to the mirthful and humorous sentiment in man's nature. There are others, again, which develope the muscular and nervous system without any considerable exhilaration afforded to the animal spirits. Now any exercise which thus operates on the separate departments of our nature simply, is only good *as far as it goes*. Though excellent of its kind, it is not the best. An exercise, for example, which should entertain and exhilarate your mind without any direct operation on the bodily functions, is not so good as one which shall both refresh the mind and build up the body; mainly because the latter saves time for work. Hence that amusement which will soonest do up its work thoroughly and get out the way, is the best. Amusements are like the scaffolding of a building, some go up on one side only, and when that is done you have got to build up another on another side; but that amusement which goes all round the man, enabling him with the utmost expedition to build up every part, and tear down the staging, and open the door of the completed house and go to work, that is the best conceivable.

Some things which people have adopted as their sole recreation might be employed all through life to the entire exclusion of work, and *then* the comprehensive design of pastime not be half realized.*

* Many household games are to be classed under this head. The game of cards, (not to allude to its moral associations with gambling and other wickednesses, which, with some, operate as an all-sufficient reason for its rejection) is open to many serious objections. It is fascinating, it absorbes the mind often with intense

But there are some specific considerations which peremptorily rule out many of the amusements in vogue among men. To these we will now direct our attention:

1. And first there are some amusements, so called, which are highly detrimental to health. All such are excluded by the very law of play which is to *build up* the body and through the body build up the mind.

There are some employments which people engage in professedly for diversion, which, so far from promoting, greatly retard the prosecution of the ordinary and sober industries of life.

Almost all of our fashionable evening entertainments are open to this objection. They break down physical constitutions by the wholesale. They rob nature of its needed repose, not occasionally, but upon a regularly organized *system*. They have filled what is called our refined society with all forms of morbid anatomy. They have inaugurated and extended a multifarious pathology hardly equalled by any or all other of the sources of physical disease. So wide-spread have their baleful effects in this direction become that we will venture the assertion that among the attendants on our large fashionable metropolitan parties there will not be found one person in five hundred, over the age of twenty-five, who enjoys a high

anxiety concerning the issue and in this way depletes vital energy more than most people have imagined, while, in respect to exhilaration and all the re-edifying purposes of a pastime, it is a poor pay-master. Time spent in playing cards is generally wasted.

average of uninterrupted health. I wish this were the only evil connected with these entertainments. There are, however, many of no less magnitude.

But, this certainly is a feature of our fashionable social life, that it is crowded like the wards of a hospital, with people galloping to early graves by self-inflicted disease.

Now, whatever may be said of other people, a *christian* certainly has no right to do, or in any way give countenance to any thing which produces disease and shortens life.

Allow me to remind you of the apostolic rule. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your *bodies* living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God." You would think that man were made entirely of soul and had neither bone nor muscle, or any bodily organ, to hear how piously some christians talk about *spiritual* things, and then see how shamefully they abuse their physical powers.

"Present their *bodies* a living sacrifice," Yes, I think I see you setting about the mockery, professor of religion, next day after to-morrow morning, after having sat up till two o'clock A. M., surfeiting yourself with fried bivalves and French confectionery. Methinks I see you crawling out of your chamber with a sleepy yawn and moping all day in the pangs and melancholic fumes of dyspepsia, a kind of galvanized mummy, a burden to yourself and everybody else, and saying, "*This* is the body which I have to present a living sacrifice to God." Now, I tell you it is a blasphemous masquerade. Remember,

God would not allow the poorest Jew in all the nation to bring the lame and the halt as a sacrifice on His altar. And when you deliberately and systematically go to work to render your physical frame as miserable a cripple as ever hobbled into Siloam, and then lay that wreck of gluttony and dissipation on the coals as an offering to God, it is the grossest insult that you could offer to high Heaven.

God has given you appetites for earthly pleasure in various forms, but you have no right to seek pleasure *in any form* which shall undermine health and abbreviate the period of mortal life. And the sooner you begin to apply this rule to *all* your pleasures, eating, drinking, social intercourse, and all the rest, the better. If you allege that people are ignorant of the sources of health and many of the producing causes of disease, I admit the fact, and grieve that it is so. But when you obey the rules with which you are already familiar, you will do far better than most of you are doing at the present time. But you have no right to remain in ignorance of the great general principles on which physical health is established and preserved.

After delivering a lecture on the duty of health the other day in Canada, I over-heard a man in the room adjoining my bed chamber say: "Well, the lecturer may do as he pleases, but as for me, I shall eat what I've a mind to, and when I'm sick go to the doctor."

Now, I am speaking in these pages to many who profess to

be serving God, and to you I say, that if you go through life on this epicurean rule, as sure as God is on the Throne, you will meet an awful retribution. If you choose to do it, then do it at your own peril, and all by yourself; but, I beseech you not to set the dreadful example to others.

But, you say, are not most people excusable for many indulgences which injure their health, inasmuch as they are ignorant of hygienic law?

I will answer this question by supposing an analogous case. Suppose a man comes to Buffalo from the Fegee Islands, where they say people eat one another with impunity, except to the man who gets eaten. The man has resided here six months a quiet citizen, when lo, one morning the old appetite for human steaks seizes on him and he proceeds to butcher one of our inhabitants in cold blood; and now collared by the Sheriff he comes into court on charge of murder and pleads not guilty, because he did not know we had any laws against killing people here. Do you think his ignorance would save him from swinging on a gibbet? Not it; though I am not sure but he could plead off on *insanity!*

And now here are people living for thirty or forty years as denizens of human society, who seemingly have not found out that they have not as much right to indulge their appetites without stint as the beasts of the field.

And pray, will their ignorance excuse them in the last day of grand assize? Some of them will find out to their sorrow when the Arch-angel's trump ushers in the fatal morning.

I am amazed to observe with what indifference many professors of religion speak of people's breaking down their constitutions.

With a laugh, it is said, "You are living fast, growing old rapidly, late hours and gluttony are getting you ready for the sexton, &c., &c."

And when people kill themselves in this way we preach sermons over their coffins on the glories of Heaven and put them on the calendar as Saints of the purest type.

2. Secondly, there are some amusements, so called, which operate detrimentally upon the mind. Some people object to some special diversions because they are too exciting, young people get too fond of them. Now, this is not an objection to the amusement, but to the person engaging in it.

The fact is, an amusement is absolutely good for nothing, unless it exhilarates and entertains you, and if you get intoxicated with the indulgence, the amusement is no more at fault than food is to be charged with all the sins of surfeiting, or than the grape is to be charged with all the sins of drunkenness. An amusement will do you no good unless it excites you, and for the time, absorbes your mind in exhilaration, just as food will do you little good unless your palate has a relish for it.

So that if there is one special diversion which you have a taste for above all others (provided there are no objections to it on other grounds,) that is the one which you ought to select,

and because of the reason before adduced, that it saves time. An amusement which you really relish will build up your body and mind in a tenth part of the time required by one toward which you feel a comparative indifference.

To illustrate, I may have two children, one of whom is exceedingly fond of music and the other of whom, while caring nothing for music, has a great mechanical turn. Now, when they get out of school it is to me a question of importance how they may be amused. And supposing I say respecting the musical boy, "There is danger that the passion for music will run away with him," and set him to building houses out of blocks, and of the mechanical boy, "There is danger that this will become too absorbing" and set him to drumming on the piano. In both these cases you see I have turned what ought to be an interesting and profitable diversion into a heavy task.

Whereas, sound judgment would dictate that, in respect to a choice of sports, I let each boy follow his own bent, provided always it is a proper one, as it generally is in children.

But just here, applying this rule to adult people, I must put in a cautionary remark. I observe, then, that it is not as safe to trust the taste of grown people in the choice of diverting employments as it is that of children; because many of the tastes of grown people are artificial, while those of children are natural.

I should say of the appetite of many people for amusement as I should of the appetite of a dyspeptic for food;

before it can be trusted to select a proper diet it must be radically reformed. The appetite of a thorough bred gourmand is no guide to food any more than that of the drunkard for drink. Take such a monstrous glutton as the Duke of Orleans or Heliogabalus, and nothing will do for them but the brains of pheasants and the livers of peacocks. Now, if that is a normal bill of fare I fear you and I must starve to death. Just as morbidly dainty as that have some people's appetites for amusement become. They have so vitiated their mental palates that nothing will relish in the shape of diversion except such indulgences as break down the whole man, body, mind and soul. I warn any of you that have thus abused your minds against the peril of obeying their cravings; for as sure as you do it you will become moral suicides.

Let us cite an example or two in point. Here is a young man who will be satisfied with no amusement save the club-room, where cigars, brandy and blasphemy wear out the night, or the race course, where foul-mouthed jockeys fleece their victims. To say that this young man has a right to obey his taste in the choice of an amusement is to say that he has a right to leap into perdition *just for the fun of the thing.*

Here is a young woman. Nothing will satisfy her, but a nightly carousal made up of tinsel, falsehood and surfeiting, which will fade the color from her cheek before she is twenty and plow wrinkles in her forehead before she is thirty. To say that she has a right to gratify her taste would be to say

that a drunkard has a right to fire up his palate with a damning thirst and then drink himself into perdition.

Therefore, let me say that, while it is an essential condition to the beneficial effect of amusements that the mind relish them and be exhilarated by them, it behooves you to be very careful that your appetites do not become morbid and vitiated by sinful indulgence.*

2. Again, a so called amusement may defeat its purpose by over taxing the mind.

Now, amusement, as such, does not directly contemplate mental culture in any form. Man was not designed to spend his whole life in the improvement of his intellectual powers. And if you, jealous of any time substracted from mental cultivation, select something for a diversion which calls thought and reasoning into requisition to any considerable extent, you will not in the end be the gainer by it; you will only weary your mind and unfit it for its legitimate business. A student

* It is custom that vitiates the appetites of so many of our youth for amusement. When the woman of style "introduces her child into society," as the phrase is, and, to begin with, takes that child to one of our fashionable evening entertainments, do you suppose the poor little creature has any relish for it? I tell you no. God never created a child in the world with such a sickly taste. That child would gladly be out in the fields gambolling with the lambs—singing with the birds.

One of the most mournful sights beneath the sky is a fashionable woman introducing her little boy or girl into society before they can spell words of two syllables. So, that by the time the little creatures have reached their teens, they are nothing but strutting peacocks without the feathers.

And parents put their children through such a tuition and then wonder that their daughters run off with fast young men, and that their sons become profligate, saying, with a pious whine, "Has not God said, 'Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old,"—and so forth!

who feels that he cannot spare time from study for actual mirthful sport—if you please, for a genuine frolic every day —and so sits down to a game of chess and calls that an amusement, is using his mental powers most unjustly. If he would really unbend his mind in a gleeful, thoughtless play spell, he will more than compensate for the time thus substracted from severe studies, by the renewed vigor of body and mind, which he will bring to his task.*

It certainly ought not to be beneath the dignity of a thoughtful man, to unbend his mind in gleeful sport.

It is said of Epaminondas that he felt it no detraction to dance, and sing, and play with the boys of the city. Scipio Africanus amused himself in gathering shells and playing at quoits with his friend Lelius; and the sage Socrates became the pupil of Aspasia in dancing, even in his old age, and Montaigne says that the old philosopher "never refused to ride the hobby-horse with the boys."—(Sweetzer's Mental Hygiene, p. 62.)

I think the drama, regarded simply as an amusement, could lawfully be condemned, upon the principle now advanced. If it had not so many corrupting associations linked with it, it might properly be resorted to for mental discipline; but looked upon simply in the light of an *Amusement*, it is

*A studious young man asked me, the other day, if it was wicked to play chess. Not for the reason which he suspected, but because it is WORK, and not play, I should advise him to regard it as very wicked.

radically at fault. Setting aside all its moral appendages, which are confessedly as bad as possible, I maintain that the practice of theatre-going, as now in vogue, must inevitably be attended with a great wear and tear, both of mind and body. I never attended a theatre in my life; but I believe that if I should, with my strong emotive temperament and nervous constitution, indulge in the practice of witnessing a thrilling drama or tragedy, two evenings in the week, it would result in breaking down my health in less than two years.

Put the theatre in the best moral condition supposable, and even then a man ought not to put his mind through the ordeal of an evening's series of plays, more than once a month. It involves an immense expenditure of mental, and hence of nervous force, to witness one well acted drama. But some one will say: It certainly is allowable to read the plays of Shakespeare more than once a month. I reply, this is not a parallel case. Reading a play and seeing it on the boards, are two widely different things. When the play of Henry VIII., or Richard III., is acted before you, you actually live in the thrilling events of a series of years, all within the space of an hour. In tragedy, the effect is still worse. Here all the emotions which deplete vital force,—fear, revenge, sorrow, &c.,—are called into the liveliest exercise. No man can habitually put himself through such an ordeal, without prematurely breaking down his constitution.

Madam Rachel, who died lately, tells us that it was a com-

mon practice with her at the close of a play, to go into a swoon. It was the legitimate effect of intense nervous excitement upon a weakly physical frame. Indeed, it is a fact universally known, that great actors are short lived. Considering the diversities of temperament, I should say that theatre-going would sooner break down a woman's constitution than a man's, simply because she has a stronger sympathetic and emotional nature, a livelier imagination, and a frailer physical texture. And I have no doubt that if you could get at the facts, you would find that more women than men have gone to an early grave, through the effects of excessive mental effort and excitement at the theatre.

So much for the mental and physical effects of this so-called amusement. Of its moral associations I need not speak, for they are too bad to dwell on in detail, before a refined audience. And in view of these, I shall not insult your common sense by inquiring whether a christian can consistently attend the theatre. I only say that if any of my church conclude to go, I hope they will apply to his Satanic majesty for a passport, and not to me.

3. But again, no amusement should belittle or degrade the mind. Any employment which is necessarily beneath your mental stature, cannot either divert or benefit you. My child can be amused with a doll and rattle-box, but I should have to go a good way down stairs to get to that.

Some people say, in objection to dancing, "If I have a

right to dance, my minister has." Now that does not follow, by any means. It is quite supposable that a grave theologian's mind should have got above that particular amusement, while the minds of many others are quite on a level with it. It might belittle his mind to dance, when, for one of his young lambs just out of school and particularly frisky, it might be the very best sport that could be chosen, both for body and mind. I do not say that it *would* necessarily belittle a minister's mind, to dance; but the thing is quite supposable. At all events, this is a fundamental law, that amusements which are entirely suitable for one age and grade of mental stature, are entirely unsuitable for another age and grade of mental stature. And nobody has any right to belittle his mind by attempting to divert it. There are sports peculiar to childhood; there are others more suitable for manhood; and while childhood should not be forced to maturity, neither should manhood ever become puerile.

4. But I pass to say, fourthly, that many so-called amusements now in vogue, are attended with a most unwarrantable expense of time, thought and money. This is peculiarly true of our large evening entertainments.

Even if these entertainments fully answered the end of diversion and physical re-edification, (which they signally fail of doing,) they would be too expensive for the end sought to be attained. I should like to have some of you undertake to run up the items of expense involved in a large evening par-

ty of fashionable society, including the expenditures of the host to entertain his guests, and the expenditures of every guest to get ready to attend. Take a party where there are one hundred and fifty guests,—one got up in style, I mean, where the host runs no hazard of being called niggardly in his hospitality, and the guests are all dressed according to the strictest legislation of fashion; take such an entertainment and I do not believe it could be got up short of twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars, at the very lowest figure. Now then, I say if every one were actually benefited in body and mind, by the entertainment, (as hardly anybody ever is,) if the social intermingling were all sincerity, (as it almost never is,) the benefits accruing would not pay for the expense incurred. And every body would so reason, if to be extravagant beyond all bounds were not the tyrannical edict of custom. Everybody would say, if everybody had common sense and moral independence enough to be singular, "The investment will not pay, it is a most foolish prodigality of time and money."

But, considering the great proportion of injury, and the diminutive proportion of good actually growing out of these entertainments, I do not hesitate to say that any man would make a far better use of a thousand dollars, to throw it into Lake Erie, than to give a fashionable party, as they are at present constructed; for in the one case the *money* only is wasted; but in the other case, the money is wasted and two

hundred lives, or more, absolutely abbreviated. And of the two hundred *souls*, what shall we say?

Now God, in perfect obedience to the rule of the subordination of play to work, has so arranged the physical and mental constitution of man, that the most rational and every way beneficial amusements can be had at the cheapest rate.

And, in fact, people of wealth and fashion know little, or nothing, about real, genial sport. They rarely have a genuine play-spell, which makes the blood leap into the cheeks and quickens the whole man in healthful exhilaration. They spend money enough in what they call diversion, to supply all the yoemen in all the rural districts on the continent with wicket clubs for a century; and yet, after all, they never get the rigidity of servile formalism taken out of them. They go through life, for the most part, unamused, undiverted, unregaled, poor, wearied ravellings from the warp of humanity. Pity for them! and yet, I must add, good enough for them, for they violate God's law, which has made economy of money and time not only consistent with healthful pastime, but *essential to it*. And breaking the divine institute, they deserve to see, as they do, many a poor laborer getting a daily invigorating frolic, without the cost of anything but shoe leather and lung power, while they who spend whole imperial fortunes on brocade and confectionery, go plodding through life like mummies out of a sepulchre of the Pharaohs.*

*I will venture the assertion that I have seen more really exhilarating sport in one hour, on a Southern plantation, than has been enjoyed during this entire winter, on the Fifth Avenue, all the way from Washington Park up to Murray Hill.

And now my poor neighbor, whose cot is never illuminated by gas chandeliers, and whose floors never dreamed of velvet medallions, be thankful that you are not rich, if with riches you must needs put your neck into the yoke of the world's tyrannizing customs.

You have the grand essential to genuine mirth, which is poverty. You cannot buy the appendages which corrupt and poison the sparkling streams of the heart's natural glee; and I am glad, for your sake, that you cannot; and I am glad you have got to be worth fifty or a hundred thousand dollars before you can buy the privilege of being a galley-slave to fashion. And considering the hard times, I have strong hopes that you will never be able to raise the money! I have a comfortable anticipation that you will die before the goddess of mammon rings the death-knell of your simple joys, by filleting you for the altar of fashion.

I tell you, my poor neighbor, the path of the world's customs does not lie parallel with the way to Zion; and it is because wealth leads to fashion, and fashion points the jewelled finger on her guide post, toward Hell, that the pen of inspiration has written that ominous sentence,—"How hardly shall they that have riches, enter the kingdom of Heaven."

CHAPTER FOURTH.

THE ART OF SANCTIFYING AMUSEMENT.

"WHETHER ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God," is a basal maxim of our religion. Christianity is a comprehensive power. Its zones encircle the whole globe of human life, with all its continents and seas. As old George Herbert quaintly has it:

> "Next to sincerity, remember still
> Thou must resolve upon INTEGRITY;
> God will have ALL thou hast,—thy mind, thy will,
> Thy thoughts, thy words, thy works."

I think a sermon from the above text, upon the duty and the science of eating and drinking, for the glory of God, would conform strictly to homiletic rules, besides having the singular excellency of being aimed at a real evil, and not at an abstraction.

Whether the fact is owing to a prevalent notion that religion does not pervade all departments of life, or the notion that some things are too insignificant in their nature, to be dignified by the presence of a religious motive, we will not affirm. But the fact is that there are many things which people do without the remotest conjecture that the glory of

God can very well be set up before them as a distinctly contemplated object. Indeed, a christian minister said to me, not long ago, that he really believed there were some *allowable* things which a man could not do for the glory of God. Now if this doctrine is true, then the very foundations of religion are upturned. If there is just *one* thing which I have a right to do, but which I cannot do for the glory of God, then, in respect to that one thing, I have thrown off allegiance to God and set up an independent government of my own. In respect to every such thing, there are two separate and conflicting sovereignties, both of which, on the supposition, have a right to be maintained.

Now let me say to you, that however tacitly you indulge the thought that you have a right, in a single instance, to seek your own happiness, independently of the honor of God, that thought strikes right at the root of the divine government,—it is a javelin plucked from Satan's quiver,—it is a firebrand out of Hell, and if the Almighty would let it spread itself, it would leave His throne a heap of smouldering ashes.

Don't you dare to harbor the idea that you can do anything lawfully which will not glorify God; and if you find yourself doing anything which conscience testifies is in conflict with that high and holy motive, don't you dare to shield your guilt under a fictitious neutrality in ethics; as if lying midway between right and wrong, there were some things

which are neither right nor wrong; a kind of neuter gender in the grammar of the divine law.

I seriously opine that Paul would never have inculcated piety, in such language as that of the text, if he had supposed that a single act of human life could be too insignificant to lie within the scope of religious obligation. And I have no doubt that he who could say, "Brethren, I beseech you to be followers of me, even as I also am of Christ," did actually set before others the example of eating and drinking, for the glory of God. You may say that eating and drinking are very small things to be distinctly contemplated in the legislation of christian duty. I reply that they were not too small to be matters for the discussion of an inspired pen; and, moreover, lightly as people may talk about eating and drinking, I think it is a matter of observation that their conduct is inconsistent with their talk. People generally treat eating and drinking as if they were pretty dignified employments. You would think a man needed some religious direction about the use of knife, and fork, and tumbler, to see how many precious hours many waste over the table, in surfeiting. Now I admit that the special acts spoken of in the text, (eating and drinking,) *are*, in point of real importance, among the smallest acts of a human life,—not deserving one-tenth part of the time and thought that are bestowed upon them; and when Christian people so treat them, in accordance with their diminutive importance, the world will have made a great ad-

vance toward the millenium. A new chapter in the history of christianity may be written when that state of things transpires.

What I want now to illustrate is, that the Bible concerns itself with religious precepts, respecting things which, in themselves considered, are of the least possible consequence. It tells you under the pressure of what motive, and with what ultimate object, to do so insignificant a thing as to eat and drink. I should infer, from this, that no act or appetite of human life, is too small to come under the direct cognizance of Christian precepts.

My object, in this chapter, is to apply this principle to the exercise of the mirthful propensities of the human mind, to all the amusements which one selects as the seasoning of life.

Philosophers divide man into the three elements of body, mind, and soul. Human nature, in other words, has three separate departments,—physical, intellectual, and moral. These have a relative importance, according to the order in which they have now been named. First, and lowest in importance, is the physical nature; second, and next in importance, is the intellectual nature; and last, is the moral nature, for the culture of which all other human endowments were designed.

It can be shown that the cultivation of each one of these departments of man's nature, tends to build up all the rest, and that the cultivation and exercise of each faculty belonging to each separate department, tends to promote every oth-

er faculty of that department, as well as indirectly, the faculties of all other departments. This rule works, not only from the higher nature of man to the lower, but likewise from the lower to the higher. It acts, and interacts, through all the parts of that wonderful series of organisms and faculties, visible and invisible, which constitute a living man.

Thus, it is affirmed by inspiration that "godliness is profitable for the life that now is;" and the doctrine is fairly inferable from this, that the cultivation of man's moral nature will best contribute to his physical well being. And so we find it in actual observation. Men who break God's moral laws, always inflict physical damage on themselves; and there is not, in the universe, such an excellent hygienic code as the Ten Commandments.

We have said that the law by which the culture of one part helps the culture of another part of man, works not only from the higher department to the lower, but from the lower to the higher. Take, for example, the two departments of body and mind, and it is a law that the cultivation of bodily vigor aids, instead of retarding, mental development. John Foster, in his immortal treatise on "Decision of Character," has advanced the observation that no man was ever greatly distinguished for that trait, who had not a firm and vigorous physical organization. Certainly, we should think that a great mistake had been made in the creation of man, if the

cultivation of one part would necessarily tend to break down another. It is not so, and never was, and never will be. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*,"—"a sound mind in a sound body,"—is a maxim which has not only age, but truth, to recommend it.

So it could be shown that the converse is true, namely: that the culture of the intellectual faculties tends to prolong bodily life. It certainly does, however differently some people may think; for philosophers have been, in all ages, the longest lived men; and to say that the cultivation of the intellect tends to impair physical health, is nothing more nor less than a slander on God.

A distinguished Doctor of Divinity died not long ago, and in the obituary notice which I saw in the newspapers, I observed the remark, made by another Doctor of Divinity, that his brother minister died from the effects of hard study. Now I am sorry that a minister of the gospel should be found uttering such a libel on the Creator. The fact is, the deceased minister had been in the constant practice of chewing tobacco, for more than half a century. And which committed the greatest sin—he, to kill himself in that way, or his brother minister to affirm, in the face of it, that he died of hard study,—I will not undertake to say. But that both were great sinners, no man, with any common sense, will deny.

But this aside.

Let me now observe that it is a fact which needs no explanation or proof, that to use a lower faculty for the good of a higher, is perfectly in accordance with the laws of the human constitution. Thus man uses the appetite for food, not for the sake of itself, (unless he is a swine,—as many are,) but for the sake of something higher,—which is nutriment and life. And again, he uses this physical life, not for itself, (unless he is a sensualist,) but for something higher, which is his own good and that of other beings.

How man's lower nature is thus made to contribute to his higher, might be illustrated in an almost endless variety of ways. Applied to intellectual pursuits, we are familiar with examples of this principle. Nothing is more common than for men to build up the body for the sake of the intellect. We have a remarkable instance of the kind, in the life of the distinguished historian who has just ended his brilliant career among us. I refer to William H. Prescott, unrivalled among the historical writers of the present century. Here is an instance of a man's regulating his physical habits of exercise with the most rigid system, in order to keep up a delicate constitution,—and *that*, in order to write history. He would rise with the robins, punctual always, to the alarm clock, and with the most religious scrupulosity, three or four hours a day were devoted to walking, or some species of recreation in the open air. Thus his physical exercise was dignified by the motive of intellectual improvement and power, which prompt-

ed it. Viewed by itself, it would be, comparatively, an ignonoble thing,—but viewed in reference to its governing motive, it is little less than sublime.

In all ages of the world, recreation has thus been dignified and made honorable by the high purpose of intellectual culture and power. Martin Luther playing on his fiddle, Bayle going from his laborious studies to witness the pranks of mountebanks, Spinosa laughing immoderately at the warfare of two spiders, Cardinal Richelieu jumping and leaping with his servant, Dr. Samuel Clark interspersing his hours of meditation with leaping over chairs, William Paley, so fond of angling that he had his portrait painted with a rod and line in his hand,—these are a few out of a thousand examples that might be cited, of the manner in which recreative sport has been ennobled by a high motive.

Luther's fiddle is not the foolish toy of a professed trifler. Paley's fishing rod was not the badge of a representative class among our young men,—polished idlers, whose elysium is a brook margin, a line and reel, and a basket vocal with the spasmodic struggles of expiring trout.

On the contrary, these several modes of pastime derived a dignity and respectability, from the purpose which animated them. Luther was a better student for his cat-gut and rosin-smeared bow, and no doubt Bayle was a better philosopher, for his merry interludes of intellectual toil; and we have a better treatise on the "Evidences of Christianity," than we should

have had, if Paley had not relieved the heavy tasks of literature with the fishing rod.

Amusements, then, are ennobled when they are used to promote intellectual culture. And now I wish to advance a step farther and say that when they are used to promote *moral* culture, they are more than ennobled,—they are *sanctified.* And may not sportive recreation be made to subserve the well-being of man's moral nature? Most certainly, if the principle which we have laid down in the former part of this chapter, be true,—if the cultivation of one part of man's nature tends to facilitate the culture of all other parts. It is very certain that no man will do much in the development of his moral nature, without the aid of his intellectual. I am very sure a man cannot pray to much profit, whose intellect is dull. And let me say here, just to illustrate this point, that the way in which abstinence and fasting promote devotion, is through the stomach to the intellect, and through the intellect to the moral feelings.*

God has not enjoined fasting in His word, for nothing. And one great reason why the Sabbath is a profitless day to so many, is that the fumes of an overloaded stomach becloud

*So Leo, "Semper virtutis cibus jejunium fuit." Fasting was always the food of virtue.

So, again, the pious Bishop Hall, "Moses, Elijah, our Saviour, fasted, each of them, forty days and forty nights. The three great fasters met gloriously in Tabor. I find not where God ever honored any man for feasting. It is abstinence, not fulness, that makes a man capable of heavenly visions of Divine glory.—["Contemplations," p. 429.

the intellect and thus clog and cripple the entire mental and moral organism. And if people would make the Sabbath a day of comparative abstinence, they would be less sleepy in church, and all the blessed means of grace peculiar to that holy day, would be twice as advantageous to them as they are at present.

Now it is perfectly conceivable how a man might indulge in an hour of exhilarating pastime, just for the sake of being a better christian by the indulgence. It is quite conceivable that one might, in order to get the full benefit of some special means of grace,—such as secret prayer, or a perusal of the scriptures, or a social prayer-meeting,—relax, and invigorate, and sharpen the intellect by an hour of sport. I can easily see how, in perfect accordance with the laws of the human constitution, one of you might, in order to drive away the vapors which hang around your mind, give an hour on Wednesday afternoon, to ball playing or skating, with the *definite purpose* of preparing for the religious exercises of Wednesday evening. Very certain am I that some of my readers would come to the prayer-meeting, far better prepared to get profit themselves, and contribute profit to others, if they would give an hour, during the afternoon previous, to exhilarating recreation.

Is Christ pleased to see you exercising your mirthful instincts, do you think! Let me answer this question by asking you another. Is God pleased when, from His high seat

of glory he looks down on yonder tree and sees the lark sitting on the edge of its nest and welcoming the dawn with its liquid songs? You would say a man was a fool to affirm that God looked on that with stolid indifference. Is God pleased when, sweeping round the scope of creation at a glance, His eye lights on a little lamb frisking on the hill-side or bounding with antic glee over the meadow sward? He is less than a philosopher, yea, I think he is something less than a man, who will deny it. Did not God create the bird and the lamb with these instincts? and, in obeying the law of their creation, do they not, according to the full measure of their capacities, glorify their Maker? Most certainly. Now let who will, deny that God has created every human being with an appetite for mirthful recreation, I never yet saw the man or woman who, on some occasion or other, unconsciously or otherwise, would not give a practical illustration of the universality of this law, by a laugh or a smile. Sure I am then, unless all God's institutes, physical and moral, are at war with one another,—sure I am that asceticism is not christianity. A scowling monk, with face composed in rigid propriety, is not the synonym for a God-glorifying christian.

If for a creature to glorify God is to please Him, (and I know of no way for you and me to glorify God, so well as to please Him,) then abstinence from mirth is not the way to glorify God; it is not sanctity, and has nothing to do with it.

God often illustrates His feelings towards His creatures, by

the feelings of parents toward their children—as thus: "Like as a father pitieth His children, so the Lord pitieth those that fear Him." And again: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." And so the examples might be multiplied, almost without limit, of this divinely chosen mode of illustrating the sentiments which the Creator feels toward the creature. So that it is a perfectly orthodox statement that just as fathers and mothers feel toward their children, just so, only with a thousand fold intensity, God feels toward *His* children.

Suppose now, a case. Some of you mothers will go into the nursery to-morrow, and there will be the children romping in high glee,—children, and blocks, and wooden horses, and cotton dogs, all mixed together in most inextricable confusion, and the merry laugh will echo from cellar to garret, through all the halls and chambers of the house. The sight makes you very happy. You go and call your husband and say, "Husband, do look at that!" and there you stand, husband and wife together, feasting your eyes and your hearts on the sight,—a more splendid panorama to your vision than all the galleries of Luxembourg and the Louvre.

One million and nine times, if not more, is this scene enacted every day in this world.

Now suppose another case: Singular event in domestic annals; you went into the nursery at 10 o'clock, A. M., yes-

terday, and there sat the children all in a row, erect as mummies, in starched propriety, not a smile quivering on any lip or lighting up any eye, every little creature buttressed about with sanctimonious sobriety, so as not to lose his perpendicular;—every thing still and solemn as a grave yard. Your countenance would darken with sad anxiety. You would go all over the house inquiring of husband, wife, servants, all, "How is this? What infernal fiend has petrified my begotten into these stark, dreary monuments of melancholy?"

Now I do not say that God would like to have the whole world turned into a nursery full of romping and playthings; but I do say that you may infer, from the illustrations I have given, that austere sobriety is no way to glorify or please God, and mirth, at proper seasons and under proper restraints, is a legitimate and Heaven sanctioned way of glorifying Him. It may be a novel doctrine that mirthful exercises are one medium of doing God service, but I hesitate not to record my belief that they are such, and ought always to be engaged in as such, and not as they are now, for the most part, without any idea that a high, moral character can possibly attach to them, or more likely a vague notion, growing out of a morbid conscientiousness, that they are, in some way or another, inconsistent with the demands of religious duty.

Now let us notice three effects which would follow the taking of mirthful exercises, out of this neutral or anti-religious position into which a false philosophy has forced them.

1. The first effect would be, that mirthful exercises would be restrained within proper limits. Pious old bishop Hall commends the man who "knows how to slacken the reins without being dissolute, and how to shorten them without a sullen rigor."—(Devotions, p. 118.)

Now I am sure that philosophy and asceticism have both been tested pretty thoroughly, in their power to restrain mirth within proper fences. But I am not aware that they ever succeeded, to any considerable extent. I think people are just about as much given to immoderate mirthful indulgence now, as they would be if not a philosopher had ever reasoned or a monk ever worn a cowl. I have no hope, either of syllogisms or of a scowling pietism, to keep professing christians from excessive gaiety. *But I have hope of the truth of God.* And the truth of God is, that mirth is a divinely implanted instinct of the human soul, and hence ought to be exercised just as any higher faculty,—as reason, memory and will are exercised,—in order to please and glorify Him who implanted it.

Now then, if all professing christians believed this, and practised upon it, do you not think we should have a revolution in some of our social habits? Suppose it was a maxim with you to go to a social party, just as much under the pressure of a christian motive, as you go to church, I think there are a good many parties to which you would be obliged to send "regrets."

On the whole, after careful reflection on the many tides of wicked amusement which have run about the altars of the christian church, I am fully of the opinion that nothing will avail to dam them up, or dry them up, save a practical recognition of the truth now advanced.

2. A second effect of putting mirthful recreation on such a christian basis as has now been described, would be greatly to increase, intensify and elevate the happiness flowing from such exercises. To illustrate my point, just suppose two cases. Suppose the child gets up in the morning and goes to its accustomed sports and engages in them all day long, without the remotest thought whether its mother is made happy or unhappy by the pleasure it experiences. Certainly, I will not deny that a child might spend a very pleasant day in this manner, as many children do.

But now suppose as soon as the sun is on the horizon, the mother says to the child: "My dear boy I want you, to-day, to engage in such and such pastimes, and I shall be thinking of you all day and be very happy in imagining what stores of glee are in reserve for you." Forth goes the child, and while his sports are, in themselves, no less pleasant and exhilarating than in the case first supposed, is not his enjoyment immensely increased and intensified by the thought that he is doing the very things which his mother wanted to have him do?

There is an adage that stolen apples are the sweetest; but it is an arrant falsehood, and no child ever was so exquisitely

happy as when, in addition to the natural delights yielded by its sportive recreations, it had the serene consciousness lighting up its little heart that that all it did, every smile and merry laugh, every romp and gleeful frolic, had the endorsement of the mother's "amen" upon it.

And now I will suppose you to spend a whole evening in social delights, laughing with most exhilarating merriment, and getting the whole man,—body, mind and soul,—re-edified by right hearty sport. I can see how you might derive a certain amount of happiness in such an exercise, without ever once thinking whether the Lord Jesus looked upon you with complacency. But if, just as the child often runs to its mother before going out on the play-ground, and flings its arms about her neck, and says, "Mother, oh what a happy time I'm going to have. Are you not glad, mother?" and drinks in the joy that swims in her brimming eyes, so you, before you went to that social glee-making, should kneel down and tell Christ how glad you knew he was that you were going to be made happy, and ask his blessing on the sunny hour; and then, at intervals, while perhaps delicious music was warbling through the halls, or some sprightly quartette of glad voices was beguiling the ear, you should look up to Christ for a glance of recognition, just as when your child is playing before your window, it often looks up to see if mother is not gazing through the pane, and perhaps exclaims, "Mother, lift up the window and look out." Oh, if *such* were your re-

lation to Christ, I should look to see you, in all your sports, just the happiest man that ever walked beneath the stars. Pastime does not pall and cloy upon the tired sense, when it is mingled with thoughts of Christ.

But I am sorry to say that there are very few, even of christians, who ever thus link their recreations in nuptial bonds with their Saviour. And therefore christians take their sportive exercise with just about as little elasticity of soul, as the world's people.

When I see an impenitent man seeking amusement, I look upon him with profound pity. I say to myself, "How much more you would enjoy innocent sport if you only knew Jesus, and then (an important addition,) you could afford to give up those which are not innocent, and now you cannot afford it."

And I look upon most christian people with very much these same throbs and throes of commiseration. The fact is, they do not half enjoy their sports, simply because they rarely invite the eyes of Christ upon them. Oh I wish, christian, that I could make the ancient record of all your pastimes. "There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there—AND JESUS WAS CALLED." And I wish, gay follower of the world's fashions, that the next time you give a party, after all the invitations are written, and before one is sent, you would sit down and write a *billet deux* to your Saviour, requesting His company, as thus: "At home on Tuesday evening. Dancing till twelve, then gluttony and

wine, almost till the larks are up." If you can include Christ in such an invitation, then I have nothing to say.

3. Once more only, I will add that a third effect of placing mirthful recreation on the christian basis that has now been described, would be, that such exercises would actually become means of grace, and helps to holiness.

"Grow in grace," is a command of universal application to all the chapters and events of a christian's life. There is never an hour or a moment of your waking time, when God excuses you from making advances in holiness. And if amusement retards growth in grace,—nay, if it will not *promote* it, then you have no business to be amused. Infinitely better be without amusement, than without piety, and so without Heaven. But amusement does not interfere with the culture of holiness. Nay, I have shown that it may be made most signally to promote it.

Every faculty and instinct that God has endowed you with, ought to be subsidized to the culture of your soul in piety. Your reason ought to help you to grow in grace, and your memory, and your will, and your imagination, and your parental affections, and your social friendships. And if *mirth* is a God implanted instinct in the human soul, then mirth ought to help you to grow in grace. In pioneering a path for Christ to enter your soul, and you to enter Heaven, God has use for all the faculties and instincts, great and small, which make you a human being. And if you so abuse any

one appetite that God cannot use it for your spiritual culture, but on the contrary it only spreads defilement on your heart, then lay not the blame to God, but to yourself. Of one thing I am sure, that every breath you draw, with a conscious recognition of the honor of Christ in the act, gives you an impulse Heavenward. And every smile on your lips, and every laugh which sends the blood bounding with its freight of exhilaration, through all your body and mind, if it is indulged for the sake of Christ, will be to you a fitting rehearsal for the anthems of the glorified. Whether any of you have ever grown in grace, through the auxilliary influence of sanctified mirth, I will not positively affirm, though I more than suspect that some have used this instinct for many years, in subservience to the kingdom of Christ, and thus are made better christians by it. I wish I could think it were thus with all, but I cannot.

In Holy Writ, we read of some to whom Christ's blessed gospel proves "a savor of death unto death." Oh, dreadful curse! that the very cross of Immanuel should be an occasion of anybody's aggravated guilt and deeper down sinking in destruction. Thus it is, however. But I shall find no fault with the gospel because it becomes, to so many, the savor of death unto death. I only find fault with those who thus pervert it from its high, and holy, and beneficent purpose. So men use their reasons to damn their souls, their memories,

their imaginations, their wills; yea, their very *consciences* are suborned to fight in alliance with the enemy of their eternal peace. What of that? Shall I blame God on this account, for endowing man with reason, memory, will, imagination, conscience? Never. And so some pervert mirth, to the utter undoing of their souls, making the midnight hour ring with beastly carousal, and jests whose filth would almost start blushes on Satan's cheek. What of that? Is that a proof that mirth cannot be sanctified? By no means. No more than imagination's being prostituted by Byron and Shelley, proves that it cannot be sanctified by Milton and Cowper.

I fear there are some of my readers who have used their mirthful instincts thus far, just as they have used every thing else, independently of Christ, and His kingdom, and glory. Well, if thus you have deliberately purposed, I am sorry. I know, very well, that my Saviour does not deserve such treatment. He has treated you better than that. Yea, it is not an unreasonable demand in Him who shed bitter tears and uttered agonizing groans for you, that you pay Him back with your smiles and laughter. And if you look that blessed Friend in the face, and say, "No, Jesus, I have not even a *smile* to give thee. I'll have my merry-making all to myself,"—woe, woe, be to you; for there is not a joy that thrills your bosom, but has its counterpart in a woe, or a pang in the heart of Calvary's sufferer. And if you cannot give pie-

ty to the smallest of your earthly schemes of joy, as well as the greatest, you come under that scathing malediction of outraged love: "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto the least of these, ye did it not to me."

CHAPTER FIFTH.

THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO AMUSEMENTS.

WHAT is the present attitude of the church to amusements? and has the church any duties respecting amusements? will be the questions before us in this chapter.

A fundamental inquiry, which will serve to develope the real attitude of the christian church toward amusements, is this: Has the church, through the medium of her teaching, or in any other way, distinctly recognized the demand for recreation, as a normal and universal attribute of the human soul? This inquiry might, in fairness, be answered by an almost unqualified negative.

Indeed, there have been important epochs in the history of the church, when she has virtually denied the mirthful instincts a place in a regenerate soul, and has scowled indignantly upon any approach to their exercise. Monachism, the Puritanism of two centuries gone, and the Methodism of Wesley, and his immediate followers, have been alike chargeable with this feature of ecclesiastical life; every one of them an extreme re-action from a corrupt and frivolous worldliness

pervading the church; every one of them an imperfect attempt to divorce the church from the world, by making her sit an unsmiling censor of every joy save that which was strictly a part of religious worship. It would be very far from the truth, to affirm that monkery has been the only development of the ascetic element which ecclesiastical history has furnished. There are those now living who can remember when it was thought a singular mark of grace in a convert, that he refrained entirely from secular music, confining his gamut simply to David's psalms; and it has not passed from the memory of our grey haired sires, that the comfort of a stove in church, was an unpardonable indulgence of fleshy desire. It is perfectly evident that the ascetic element was not entirely worn out when Edwards preached, and Wesley died. Nor is it worn out yet, nor will it ever be till the millenium dawns; and then faith may put on her choicest robes of sanctity, without shriveling up or turning awry a single instinct that God has planted in the human soul. Till then, there will doubtless always be those who cannot conceive a high ideal of piety which shall not, in a certain manner or degree, contravene some of the institutes of man's physical and mental constitution.

But what is the present attitude of the church, toward amusements? We answer, it is very much one of confessed impotence or of indifference. Not altogether such, certainly, but characterized, in great measure, by one of these two ex-

tremes. As to the first charge of impotence, it is not much to say that the church has restrained her members from amusements of a decided immoral tendency, such as circuses, play-houses and masquerades. It could be shown, without much research, that she has by no means, altogether succeeded, even in *this;* for thousands of church members, "in good and regular standing," as far as the books show, as "*rectus in ecclesia*," as Calvin or Edwards, *do* gloat their eyes on the indecent exposures of the circus, *do* figure in extravagant masquerade, and *do* feed the coffers of theatre lessees and managers,—grog shops and third-tier included. It is tacitly confessed by many churches, yea, by whole denominations, that these things are not tangibilities for ecclesiastical discipline. Not even *these* shameless bandits who are rifling our purity und pillaging God's altars, is there a legislative and executive force sufficient to convict and bring to judgment.

But what shall be said concerning amusements of less distinctly marked immoral tendency than those now alluded to. Has the church excluded or restrained them? Take the example of our large metropolitan midnight parties, where stomachs, minds and souls are put in one smouldering heap together, on the altar of fashion; and has the church put fences around them high enough to keep the sheep and lambs from leaping over? I only need to refer to the pastors of wealthy metropolitan churches for an answer as humiliating and sad, as it is true. Very true, there are many churches.

even in cities, where the contagion of fashionable party-going has not spread itself; but they are made up of the *poorer classes;* and but for the accident of poverty, many of their members would doubtless follow the example of their wealthy brethren, and, not to be singular, put on the badge and become loyal to the maxims of polished worldliness. So small an opinion have we of human nature, even when partially sanctified, that we should look to see worldly conformity among church members multiplied ten-fold, but for the prevailing poverty, which we have just called an accident, but which we ought to have called a blessed *providence*, designed to save God's heritage from wide-spread corruption.

Virtually then, we affirm that the church, in so far as she has had any organized system of social recreation, *has let the world cater for her.* And has not the world performed its commission with a witness? "It costs us a great deal," says the world, "to get up the dish called recreation. It very often costs thousands of dollars for one evening's entertainment besides an immense expenditure of health in late hours, gluttony, and so forth. Besides these large fees, you must throw in the 'small change' of conscience-gripes, and soul-taints, and spiritual deadness."* "Rather a hard bargain," says the church; "but can we spread out a recreative bill of fare at any cheaper rate?" And so, not liking it altogether, but not knowing exactly how to get out of it, like one selling his

*I do not wonder at old Ezekiel Hopkins' pithy saying, "The world is the devil's factor, and drives on the designs of Hell."

jewels to the pawn-broker for a song, the church succumbs. Once in a while there is a protest from some ecclesiastical association or bench of elders; the minister and a few grave ones, refrain altogether; but the frisky young lambs (and not a few of the sheep,) leap over all fences, run their papas in debt for laces and jewels, keep their mothers awake till morning, for them to come home from midnight dissipation, run up thousands of doctors' bills for dyspepsia; in short, ritter themselves away, body and mind; and all this time the church laments, but confesses that a remedy is out of her reach.

Most devoutly do we wish that some of our readers may be found able to show, from actual facts in localities where the facilities for extravagant dissipation abound, that we have overstated this aspect of the subject. But we do not suspect that any one will seriously undertake the task.

But we have said that the church also assumes an attitude of *indifference* toward amusements. We cannot think of a better name to describe the posture now alluded to. Certainly we do not mean indifference of sentiment and feeling; but rather indifference of *conduct*. "Better not say anything specifically about amusements. Better not tell people that they may be amused. They will get amusement enough without any help from the teachers of religion." This language embodies a sentiment widely prevalent in the church. The idea is that christian people have gone too far with amusements already, and if we say anything under the sanc-

tion of religion, *pro* or *con*, it will be likely only to push them to still greater excesses. There is no doubt as to the fact that christians have gone too far with amusements, for the most part taking up with whatever happened to come to hand under the administration of a wicked world. But to deduce a *let alone* policy from this state of things is just to let a dyspeptic, wtth a morbidly ravenous appetite, gorge himself to death with sweetmeats without looking around for a wholesome diet to prescribe to him, on the frivolous plea, "Oh, he'll eat enough, no danger about that. Better not say anything on *that* subject!" Very true, christian professors will, in great numbers, get amusement enough without ecclesiastical encouragement; but is it no concern with the church *in what manner* they get it? Or are *all* methods of amusement equally open to objection? Most certainly if the church has a right to tell her members how they may *not* seek recreation, she has a right, nay, it is but a just demand, that she tell them how they *may* seek it. She need not go into such minuteness of detail as to set aside individual judgment and responsibility; but she may and ought to go as far in laying down the principles of normal amusements as in exposing the principles and associations of those which are detrimental to christian character. We conceive that the legitimate province and obligation of the church extend as far in one direction as they do in the other.

But it will be said by some in reply to this, that, during

seasons of revival, the attitude of the church toward amusements is neither one of impotence nor indifference. When a deep religious interest pervades community there is developed a strong antagonism of feeling against amusements, and a power likewise adequate to their entire suppression in christian circles. We admit the fact; but must add with sadness, that this antagonism and power of expulsion are of very brief duration. Revivals do not blot out people's appetite for amusement any more than they blot out people's intellect and imagination. Revivals may for a time so absorb the minds of people with strictly religious concerns that they shall become oblivious of their recreative instincts, just as often intense thought and activity about business make a man pass his dinner hour without a sense of hunger. But this state of things cannot last forever; at any rate we have eighteen hundred years to bear witness that it never *has* lasted beyond a given period of a few months. And if men's absorption in business, though it may suspend, cannot quench their appetite for food, neither can revivals, though they may temporarily restrain, ever quench people's appetite for recreation. One would think the church had had an experience which should have taught her this; *for* was it ever heard of in the progress of christianity that a revival was not followed by a reaction into worldliness and frivolity? And yet we add, parenthetically, blessed be God for revivals; for, though it is quite conceivable that christianity might advance

in a more healthy manner and with more permanency of results, yet Divine providence and grace have alike been signally manifest in these periodic awakenings.

Many people innocently suppose that, when a revival gives a temporary check to all mirthful employments, this condition of things (considered moreover by not a few as highly desirable) will endure. *But it does not endure, it never did endure,* probably it never will endure as human nature is at present constructed. The converts who a year ago never dreamed of amusements, on account of their mental absorpinto in religious concerns, are now seeking amusements; in multitudes of cases, we are pained to add, seeking amusement at the expense of holiness. We are not surprised. The thing ought to have been expected both from past experience and from the laws of the human mind.

The question is often asked by good people in objection to amusements, "Do christians want amusement in a revival?" Many persons are staggered by this inquiry. They cannot deny the fact that revivals *do* put an end to amusements in the church. They very often utterly stop social tea-gatherings and things of the like harmless and wholly beneficial character. This question, "Do Christians want amusement in a revival?" has a plausible objection wrapped up in it. Now it might fairly be asked in reply to it, whether revivals are *entirely* healthy developments of human experience? I suppose no man will pretend that they are such. It might

be asked again, if it is not quite supposable that emyloyments, which may be properly suspended at one time, might not only be lawful but likewise be imperatively demanded at another? Certainly it may be affirmed without presumption, that revivals, as we have them at present, do not furnish us an entirely true and comprehensive type of the wants of human nature. And till it can be shown that they do so, nay, till it can be shown that revivals are the *finishing up* of the human soul to the very last essential of intellectual and moral perfection, the objection to amusements founded on the question "Do people want amusements in revivals?" will not be altogether pertinent.

It is a fair question which worldly people address to the church, when, by her ministry and ordinances, she asks them to give up their sinful diversions and come within her pale, "What have you better to give us?" We may answer, "peace of conscience, communion with God, and all the blessed sheaves of holy joy laid up in the sanctuary." But this does not quite meet the question proposed. "When we become Christians," say the world's people, "we cannot be wholly independent of social recreations. And has the church a genial and thoroughly organized social life to offer us in the place of our dissipating, frivolous, and confessedly corrupting amusements? There are a thousand and one pastimes which are damning to the soul simply because of their accidental associations. Will the church give us any one or

a dozen of these, divorced by the ban of ecclesiastical precedent and sanction from these wicked associations?" So say worldly people. Now is all this arrogant impertinence? Has the world no business at all to propound to the church inquiries like these?

We are very far from affirming that christianity can or ought to take *all* the amusements which are tainted by wicked associations and dissolve the tie and then deed them over by the wholesale to her followers. She need not do this, any more than a mother need go and buy out a toy-shop for her child. But need she do nothing more than she has done? Need she not organize a social life underneath the aegis of her holy sanctions? Need she not set the seal of her *distinct* approval on whatever exhilarating and re-edifying sports can be divorced from corrupting connections? Nay, more, need she not, in some manner and to some degree, *herself* attempt to effect such a divorce?

It is very easy to conceive a condition of things, (call it Utopian, if you will,) in which the church with more plausibility than now, nay with more *power* likewise, might dissuade her members from corrupting and frivolous amusements. It is very easy to imagine, however difficult it may be to realize, a state of things in which the church should be able to say to those whom she invites within her sacred enclosure, "We have under our sanction a supply for your recreative appetites purer and better everyway than the world

furnishes. We will give you a genial, social life, freed from the admixture of heartlessness, extravagance, and dissipation. We will give you, in company with those of like heavenly purposes and hopes, all the recreation that is requisite to lubricate the machinery of life's serious labor; we have it all, if not as a systematically organized institution, yet we have it distinctly under our sanction. And moreover, our members are pledged to confine their recreations within these limits; they will sustain by their intelligence, their social standing, the influence whieh wealth gives to them*, by all that makes up social power, they will sustain these appliances of normal, healthful, elevating pastime. Moreover, they will persistently frown down the amusements which admit elements and connections detrimental to christian character and injurious to body and mind. They will not be bribed by custom, not even by domestic aud kindred affection, to countenance these amusements. They will not give them even the sanction of their passing presence. They will not be spectators in them; but, on the contrary ,in every way, direct and indirect, they will endeavor to sustain and enliven the pastimes to which religion can accord its unqualified approval."

Even if a condition of things something like that now described be deemed impracticable, so Utopian as not to de-

*Not the direct influence of wealth, but the *indirect*. For hardly anything is so cheap as rational amusements, and when the church has these and none others, she will have dollars to give to Christ's poor and to missions where now she has only pennies and smooth sixpences!

serve a moment's consideration, so fanciful and ideal as to be utterly beyond the reach of anything but an insane hope, it will yet be confessed that it would be, in some important particulars, an improvement upon the present position of the christian church. It certainly would not, as many are afraid, break down the wall of partition between the church and the world; but, on the contrary, would in the most emphatic way echo the inspired description of God's heritage: "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; which in time past were not a people, but are the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; that, whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.*" (1. Peter 2, 9—12.)

It is scarcely to be expected that the church as an organization, or any denomination, through the medium of its own special ecclesiastical legislation, will inaugurate any approach toward such a condition of things as has been described. If it were seriously proposed to-day in any "convention," "conference," "association," "classis," or "presbytery" that the

representative and executive men sit in grave council to consider the recreative demands of church members, we could hardly hope that the mover in such a novel adventure would escape without a suspicion of insanity attached to him, and not unlikely he might think himself fortunate to get off with so charitable an alternative. Not that we affirm that ecclesiastical bodies are not willing to take up the subject of amusement in some form; though some never touch them in *any* form.

But those who *have* taken the matter up see no duty lying within their province save that of condemnation, for which there is certainly at present abundant cause. We will not positively affirm that ecclesiastical bodies, *as such*, have a duty to perform respecting amusements *beyond* that of condemnation. But we more than suspect that they have. We will not positively affirm that, having pointed out to church members the spots on the atlas where are rocks and breakers, they are in duty bound to point them to the region of clear water; and, if there is none at present which is not interlaced with reefs and shallows, that they should look about for some moral machinery to clear out the rocks, dig out the shoals, and open at least a vessel's width of navigable water. We will not dogmatically propound a duty so novel to grave doctors in ecclesiastical conclave. And yet stranger things will transpire some centuries hence than a special session of a presbytery, not only to tell the sheep of tangled forests where lions lurk and wolves whet their teeth; but to lead them to

meadows where crystal springs bubble and verdure and sunshine paint a scene of moral beauty. To be plain, more marvellous things will be recorded in the history of the shadowy future than that, on a certain day, grave theologians and elders condescended to tell christians, with the emphasis of ecclesiastical authority, on what principles *they might lawfully be amused.* Not yet however.

Meantime we are not altogether without hope. There will be found here and there a pastor who, alike recognizing the recreative demands of human nature and its dreadful abuses in corrupt amusements, will not be altogether satisfied with the results of unqualified condemnation and warning as thus far developed in the history of the church. There will be pastors of such singular type, so astray from the rigid lines of long established precedent, that they will prayerfully and industriously adventure the enterprize of successfully dissuading their members from hurtful amusements by inaugurating a social life *in the church,* which shall embosom within itself every diversion that human nature requires, as utterly divorced from carnal and worldly and poisonous connections as the ordinances of the Sabbath and the sanctuary. And it is not beyond conjecture that a pastor even of some one of our metropolitan churches should in some such way as this, always of course under the superintendence of religious motives, succeed gradually in winning his flock away from the poisonous pleasures which the world has spread out for them;

upon a principle similar to that in domestic life, where such a model parent as Leigh Richmond provides recreations in almost every conceivable form for his children around the fireside, and thus wards off the noxious influences of the playhouse and the gambling saloon.

It is quite conceivable that, in process of time, such a pastor, with his whole soul enlisted in the work of divorcing his flock from worldly alliances, should be able to point the eyes of the wicked to them, as a people no less peculiar in their recreations than in their worship, no less singular in their glee-makings than in their prayer-meetings. And then, with what forcible pertinence such a pastor could say to the world's people or to world-aping professors, when they invite his flock to their wicked festivities, "We have something better, thank you, we shall not starve to death because we forswear the dainties of the devil's kitchen."

But some one will say, "Such a process would break up all our prevalent social life," And what of that? We are no revolutionizer, but we will venture the assertion that if the social life of large cities was thoroughly broken up by the pressure of pure and undefiled religion, the world would set a stake forward in its progress toward civilization. What is there, pray tell us, which the gospel may not break up or break down, in its remedial pressure on the soul of man? "But," says another, "such a process as you have indicated would divide families; children often could not mingle in the

same social joys with their parents, nor brothers with their sisters, nor wives with their husbands." Very true, such a wall of partition would often divide houses from cellar to attic. But did not He who said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me," contemplate a division of family interests and alliances wherever His service demanded? "But such a process would make the church a close corporation, almost a secret society, an exclusive body," says another. Let it be so, we reply; and moreover we shall rejoice to see the day when the church shall exchange exclusiveness of doctrine and polity for exclusiveness of *life*. At present she presents to the world the grotesque picture of a militant body, fiercely contending for forms and symbols of faith and governmental theories; but quite reconciled, during a cessation of hostilities, to give her members a brief leave of absence to dodge over to the enemy's lines and have a dance with Belial, or sit down to a game of whist with Appolyon! Let the church be a close corporation, an exclusive organization; for such was she designed to be; a fitting antitype of that upper chamber WHOSE DOORS WERE SHUT, and through whose chinks only Immanuel might glide with His benison of peace. Let her yield her most unqualified loyalty to that high edict, "Be not confirmed to this world," and then let the world fling at her the accusation of exclusiveness if it pleases, and the charge shall only recoil with redoubled energy of conviction and retribution upon the impious lips that uttered it.

We have attempted in this chapter the development of no new fangled theory respecting a possible and proper attitude of our organized christianity toward amusements, other than that which it at present assumes. We have more than hinted, however, that some new line of conduct relative to them is greatly demanded. Exactly what that line of conduct should be, is a question which deserves and, before it is satisfactorily answered must engage, the reflection and prayers and counsels of the wisest and best men that God has given to the church, both in the pulpit and out of it. Of one thing we may be confident, that any form of ecclesiastical policy, which shall not distinctly recognize the existence and all the righteous demands of man's recreative instincts, will signally fail of its purpose. It will be quite essential that those who undertake even to *approach* a solution of this difficult problem be familiar not only with the laws of God's revealed word, but with the equally real and divinely authoritative institutes of man's body and mind.

Meantime it will be frivolous in the extreme for us to suppose that no new light can possibly be shed upon this untrodden path, either from God or man. The church is in a sad posture surely if she must let the spring tides of worldliness roll over her altars as at present without endeavoring to lay a single new stone upon the breakwaters that gird her round. Can nothing be done but to ring the old changes of centuries gone against sinful recreation, mystifying people's

consciences with pious generalities? If nothing more can be done, if no strategy can be devised which has a single novel feature about it, then we almost despair. In her old track the church of God must go, like the streams of the psalmist's graphic pencil, *up by the mountains and down by the valleys.* Piety will become sublimed in absorbing raptures, and then become sick of holy musings and trail in the dust. Amusements will go on as they have done since the beginning. The world will spread out its wicked dainties and the church will sit down as a guest at its table. And as a result the old cry of "the inconsistency of the professors of religion" will be sounded on through centuries, and, true in fact as well as false in logic, it will repel thousands from christianity who would otherwise repose all their hopes to her guardianship and all their conduct to her precepts. And, seeing how gracefully the church exchanges her purity for the smiles of a wicked world, multitudes outside of her pale will follow the precedent to its farthest issues; and, in the homely figure of old Thomas Adams, in his comments upon the choice of Esau, "for a mess of gruel, sell the supper of glory."

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